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For Immediate Release

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State Environment Department Issues Compliance Order to Valley Estates Water System in Espanola for High Nitrate Levels in Drinking Water

(Santa Fe, NM) –The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) today issued an Administrative Compliance Order to the Valley Estates Mutual Domestic Water & Sewer Association (MDW & SA) in Espanola for violations of state Drinking Water Regulations. Beginning in April of 2000, the water system has repeatedly exceeded the Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) for nitrate in drinking water.

“Access to safe drinking water is the right of every New Mexican,” said Ana Marie Ortiz, Director of NMED’s Field Operations Division. “34 months is far too long a time to deny that right.

“Under its new leadership, NMED has moved quickly to take care of this problem,” Ortiz continued. “Governor Richardson and Secretary Curry have directed the Environment Department to be faster in enforcement and in the vital protection we provide to the state’s citizens.”

The Administrative Compliance Order compels Valley Estates MDW & SA to immediately provide bottled water of acceptable quality to pregnant customers and all families with children under the age of six, notify all customers of the nitrate MCL, and conduct a feasibility study to determine what changes are needed to provide water within acceptable standards. Failure to comply with the requirement of the order may result in civil penalties.

The Valley Estates MDW & SA provides piped drinking water to approximately 200 consumers living at the Valley Estates development in Espanola.

Nitrate in drinking water is a serious health concern for infants. Infants below the age of six months who drink water containing nitrate in excess of the MCL could become seriously ill and, if not given treatment, may die. Symptoms include shortness of breath and a blue or gray coloring of the skin (often referred to as “blue baby syndrome”). Symptoms in infants can develop rapidly, with health deteriorating over a period of days. Although infants under six months are at greatest risk, pregnant and nursing women and children under eight years of age should limit their intake of tap water until nitrate levels decrease. If symptoms occur, consumers of the water system should seek medical attention immediately.

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Consumers of the Valley Estates MDW & SA **SHOULD NOT BOIL** their water. Boiling will increase the level of nitrates in the water. Bottled water or other water from an approved water source should be used until further notice.

For additional information, contact Darren Padilla, Hydrologist, NMED Drinking Water Bureau, at (505) 827-1400 x1044, or Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED, at (505) 827-0314.

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